

2/23/2004 This Week In Congress

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February 23, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Wrapping Up "Big First" Listening Tour

On Thursday, I completed this year's "Big First" Listening Tour with stops in Dodge City and Jetmore. During the past few months, I have been holding town hall meetings in every county in the First Congressional District, and I appreciate that folks took time out of their busy schedules to meet with me. Meeting with Kansans during the tour is one of my favorite parts of representing the First District. Whether it is in the local cafe, the county courthouse or just out on Main Street, the tour gives me the opportunity to meet with Kansans face to face.

This year's tour reaffirmed my belief that the best folks in this country are found in Kansas. During the tour, I heard from parents who were concerned about their children's education, doctors and nurses who wanted to provide their patients with the best possible care, and farmers and ranchers troubled by the continuing drought.

I can now take the suggestions and concerns of Kansans directly back to Washington, D.C. All along the tour route, Kansans expressed their frustrations with issues ranging from the rising costs of health care and the war in Iraq, to the economy and the survival of small businesses. I will be using the concerns that Kansans shared with me to guide me during the congressional session.

Reception Honoring Kansas Veterans in Washington, D.C.

During this year's Memorial Day weekend in May, thousands of WWII veterans from across the country will gather in Washington, D.C. for the dedication of the new WWII memorial that is located on the National Mall. I will be hosting a reception on Saturday, May 29, 2004, in Washington, D.C. to honor Kansas veterans attending the National World War II Memorial dedication.

The reception will be held on Saturday, May 29, 2004, from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m., in the atrium of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW in Washington D.C. The building is located about four blocks from the National World War II Memorial dedication site.

This memorial honors the 16 million Americans who answered the call to service, the 400,000 Americans who gave the ultimate sacrifice, and the millions who supported our troops at home. It is my privilege to offer veterans and their families an opportunity to come together as Kansans while visiting Washington, D.C. and attending the memorial dedication ceremony.

For more information about the Kansas veterans' reception or to RSVP, please contact my Hays district office at (785) 628-6401. For more information about the dedication, please visit the National World War II Memorial website at <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/> or call (800) 639-4992.

Smoky Hills Pubic Television Receives Grant to Update Technology

On Friday morning, it was announced that Smoky Hills Public Television (SHPTV), based in Bunker Hill, would receive a \$1,470,094 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assist in the conversion to a digital broadcast signal. The station received the grant at a presentation at the Dole Center at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Hilda Legg, Administrator of the USDA Rural Utilities Service, and Federal Communication Commission Chairman Michael Powell were on hand for the presentation. Lloyd Mintzmyer, Interim General Manager of SHPTV, accepted the grant on behalf of the station.

SHPTV, like all television stations, faces the FCC mandate to convert from analog service to a digital signal by the end of 2006. This grant will fund a full power digital television transmission facility near Colby.

Serving more than 431,000 people in 52 counties in central and western Kansas, the new digital broadcasting will mean a greatly improved picture and sound for viewers. Multicasting, high-definition broadcasting, data delivery and rural broadband services will all be delivered by way of a digital signal.

Public television is important in providing quality programming across our state. The technology upgrade for Smoky Hills will ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy public television.

Appearing on "Kansas Health Watch"

This week, I will be appearing on Wichita Public Television KPTS to discuss the rising costs of health care and health insurance. The program, entitled "Kansas Health Watch," will air on Friday, February 27, at 8:00 p.m. on KPTS.

Dale Goter, public affairs editor at KPTS, will moderate the program. Also taking part in the program will be the Director of the Kansas Governor's Office of Health Planning and Finance, Dr. Robert Day, and Sedgwick County Commissioner Tim Norton.

The program will air on Wichita Public Television on Friday, February 27, at 8:00 p.m. and again on Saturday, February 28, at 9:30 a.m. The program will also air on Topeka Public Television on Sunday, February 29, at 12:30 p.m. and on Smoky Hills Public Television on Sunday, February 29, at 12:00 p.m.

Please consult your local cable company or local program guide to determine the public television channel in your area.

Cheering on the KU Jayhawks

On Saturday afternoon, I joined with thousands of Jayhawk fans to cheer on the University of Kansas men's basketball team in an overtime victory against the Iowa State Cyclones. It is always a good to watch the Jayhawks in Allen Fieldhouse, and I am pleased that we were able to squeak past the Cyclones.

Congress to Start New Mail Procedures

The discovery of the poison ricin in the mailroom of a Senate office earlier in the month resulted in the suspension of all mail service to the House and Senate offices in Washington, D.C. Mail has not been delivered to my Washington, D.C. office since the beginning of February, and there is an estimated backlog of 600,000 pieces of mail that have not been delivered to the House offices and may not be delivered for some time. Mail service to my district offices in Hutchinson and Hays has not been interrupted.

Starting this week, the House and the Senate are scheduled to begin new mail inspection procedures. Before the recent discovery of ricin, all mail was screened and irradiated for toxins at an off-site location. The mail will continue to be screened, but under the new procedures, all letters also will be removed from the envelopes to ensure that no toxins are present. The letter will then be reinserted into the envelope, stapled shut, and then delivered to my office. It is estimated

that these new procedures will delay mail delivery to my office by about two weeks.

It is unfortunate that these new safety procedures will increase the delay in mail delivery to my Washington, D.C. office, but I appreciate your patience as we deal with this new mail procedure. In addition, I am encouraging folks to call, fax or email me with their questions and concerns. The contact information for each of my offices is listed below.

Very truly yours,

Jerry